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HOW A CONSOLIDATED HIGH SCHOOL PROVIDES BETTER EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.

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THE RIVER VIEW SCHOOL DISTRICT IN COSHOCTON COUNTY, OHIO, HAS EMERGED SINCE 1957 AS A RESULT OF CONSOLIDATION OF SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS IN THE COUNTY. THIS CONSOLIDATED DISTRICT NOW HAS ONE HIGH SCHOOL (GRADES 9-12) WITH AN ENROLLMENT OF 1000 STUDENTS. AS A RESULT OF CONSOLIDATION, THE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE NOW PROVIDED BETTER EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. SOME OF THESE OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE--(1) INCREASED COURSE OFFERINGS, (2) ADDITIONAL COCURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, (3) MORE EFFECTIVE TEACHER UTILIZATION, (4) BETTER BALANCE IN CLASS SIZE, AND (5) ADDITIONAL STUDENT PERSONNEL SERVICES. TEST RESULTS SHOW THE SENIORS OF THE CONSOLIDATED HIGH SCHOOL ACHIEVING ONE GRADE LEVEL ABOVE THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN THE SMALL HIGH SCHOOLS PRIOR TO CONSOLIDATION. ALSO, MORE SENIORS ARE NOW ENROLLING IN COLLEGE (NINE PER CENT). THE SPEAKER CONCLUDES THAT THE CONSOLIDATED HIGH SCHOOL OFFERS AN ACADEMIC CLIMATE WITH AN INCREASED EMPHASIS ON STUDENT COMPETITION. THIS SPEECH WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D. C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (ES)

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Special Session on Education
and Training of Rural Youth

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"HOW A CONSOLIDATED HIGH SCHOOL PROVIDES BETTER EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES"

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It is a real privilege to take part in this National Outlook Conference on Rural Youth.

The topic to whom I am to address myself today reminds me a little of the old gag concerning the fellow who ask his friend how his wife was and got back the reply "compared to what?"

My attempt here will be to spend a few minutes discussing my experience in comparing the educational opportunities of a consolidated high school with those of the small rural high schools, prior to consolidation, which now compose the new consolidated high school.

First of all, I might say that I have been a Superintendent in three consolidated districts in Ohio, each of which took in a larger territory and provided a more extensive program than the preceding one.

To get down to the brass tacks of my remarks let me provide a brief background of the consolidated system I now serve.

The River View School District in Coshocton County, Ohio, has evolved in a two stage consolidation.

The first consolidation took place by action of the County Board of Education in 1957 when three small school districts with high school enrollments of 105, 81, and 120 at that time, were consolidated into a central school district, and in 1959 one high school was developed in an already existing building.

In 1962 a further consolidation came about, again by initiative of the County Board of Education pretty much. At this time two additional small districts in the County, who maintained high schools, plus two small elementary districts, who did not have high schools, merged into the consolidation which became known as River View.

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Donald Rushing

At the time of the final consolidation in 1962, the two latest high schools involved had enrollment of 131 and 145 high school pupils. (9-12).

I might inject here that a prime motivating factor in initiating consolidation such as River View in Ohio has been the raising of State minimum standards for maintaining high school charters. This state revocation of sub-standard high schools began in earnest in Ohio about 1959. The enrollment standards at that time was 240 in grades 9-12. There were also many other standards which were not met by many schools which resulted in loss of charter, thus somewhat forcing some consolidation.

To get back to the discussion, the new consolidated high school for the River View District was completed in the fall of 1965 after being defeated once by the voters.

This high school presently has an enrollment (9-12) of just under 1,000 students. The district itself encompasses 365 square miles with a total district enrollment of 3,000 pupils.

The high school is located near the center of the district in distances ranging from 2 to 15 miles from each of the elementary centers.

Our transportation fleet has 36 buses all dual routed averaging 4,400 miles per day.

As the topic suggest, if one subscribes to the idea that consolidated high schools do in fact provide better educational opportunities some sort of evidence must be presented other than educational theory conceived somewhere in never-never land. Let's consider the following:

Number 1 - Let's take a brief look at course offerings, which universally is accepted as one bench mark of a good educational program.

Prior to the 1st stage of consolidation in 1957 none of the three small high schools involved has more than 25 courses offered for credit in any one year. After 1959 when the three small high schools were organized into one high school, with an enrollment of about 350 pupils, the course offerings jumped to 35 and this increased to 42 by 1963.

Presently the new consolidated high school River View is offering 87 courses for credit each year. This represents over three times the course offerings any of the high schools had prior to the 1st consolidation and over twice the offerings of the first high school after consolidation.

One of major curriculum additions in the new high school has been in the area of Vocational Education.

Donald Rushing

We have Auto Mechanics I and II, Electronics I and II, Cosmotology I and II, and 2 1/2 units of Vocational Business and Office Education all approved under the Vocational Trade and Industry program in Ohio. These are for juniors and seniors.

Next year we are adding machine shop to the vocational program.

In addition to the vocational areas which have been added, the following curriculum areas have been either added to; expanded, or improved:

1. Mathematics has been expanded to seven courses. Prior to consolidation there were three courses offered in each high school.

2. Foreign language has been expanded to three languages each for four years. Prior to consolidation the language offerings were limited to two languages (Latin and Spanish) for two years each.

3. The science curriculum has now eight course offerings including Human Physiology, two years of Biology, Physical Science, General Science, Physics, Chemistry, and a Science seminar. Before consolidation chemistry and physics were alternate years, one year of biology and one year of general science.

4. Social Studies included American History, World History and Government prior to consolidation. Presently the offerings are those mentioned plus Psychology, Sociology, World Geography, Modern History and A & D.

5. The English curriculum prior to consolidation consisted of four years of English with no grouping of students involved.

The present program groups College English, General English, and Practical English on each grade level plus Dramatics, Journalism, Speech and Composition and Library Science, as separate courses.

6. In the Industrial Arts area, four years of Drafting is part of the program as well as the regular wood, metal, forging, and electrical phases of the program. Formerly only wood working and two years of drafting were provided for.

7. In the Music area, we now have several levels of chorus, choir, band, concert orchestra, plus theory of music and music appreciation as course offerings.

8. In the interests of time the above will suffice, I believe, to make the comparison of curriculum somewhat in contrast.

Number II - Let's take a look at student activities which also reflect educational opportunities for students.

Prior to consolidation, the small high school activities were limited to FFA, FHA, Science Club, Audio-Visual Club, and Student Council. These of course were in addition to basketball, baseball, and band and chorus.

Donald Rushing

Presently River View High School has the following student activities:

1. All the State Sanctioned Competitive sports except swimming.

2. Several levels of band, orchestra, chorus, and ensemble work.

3. Student Council, Future Teacher's Club, Psychology Club, Dramatic Club, Medical Interest Club, Language Club, Science Club, Rocket Club, Vocational Club, National Honor Society, FFA, FHA, Varsity Club, Yearbook, Newspaper, Librarians Club and others almost too numerous to mention.

Number III - Let's look at the comparisons of the Instructional program in general.

Prior to consolidation, in the small high school, there were 10 teachers who had 4 different class preparations per day; 15 teachers had 5 different preparations, and 8 teachers had as many as 6 different preparations per day. Hardly condusive of doing an effective presentation to a class.

In the high school today no teacher has more than 2 different preparations per day other than to fit his presentation to a particular class.

Number IV - Let's look at class size which has economic as well as academic implications.

Prior to consolidation in the small high schools there were a total of 31 classes which had less than 10 pupils, and 72 classes which had less than 15 pupils.

In Ohio, the State aid program is based upon a class unit of 30 students per teacher.

Also conversely, there were 42 classes which had a pupil range of in excess of 38 pupils. Again not educationally sound.

Presently, the consolidation high school has no class larger than 28 pupils and this is still a little high perhaps; but in English classes the ratio is 23.

Due to the comprehensive program, some small classes of less than 15 are inevitable. However, there are only seven classes with less than 15 enrollment in the academic program. (This is exclusive of the vocational classes.)

Number V - Let's consider Pupil Personnel Services or Special services to students which further reflect an effective educational program.

None of the small schools before consolidation had a certified librarian and only one of the 5 small high schools had a certified guidance counsellor, and his services were half time.

Donald Rushing

There were no health services other than those provided by the County Health Office.

Duties of attendance and pupil accounting were a part of the high school principal's duties.

At the consolidated high schools there are presently two fully certified, full time counsellors and a half time counsellor who is responsible for the Vocational Program Counselling Services.

The library is staffed by a full time certified librarian, who also has a secretarial worker plus numerous student library aides.

A registered nurse provides health services and cooperates in the Health classes.

Attendance and pupil accounting, as well as the chief responsibility for discipline, is assigned to a full time assistant principal who has a Master's degree in School Administration.

Despite all of the comparative statements thus far, a logical, legitimate question which still must be answered is: "Where is the objective evidence that consolidated high schools provide better opportunities?"

This objective evidence, obviously is the hardest to come by. However, without some objective measurements, the case for consolidation is open to deep scrutiny.

I can only cite the evidence that apply to my own district and past experience.

One common procedure of obtaining objective information in Education, of course, is that of the use of standardized achievement tests.

In 1964 the various senior classes in the existing high schools were given the California Achievement Complete Advanced Battery along with the California Mental Maturity test to determine achievement in six areas of subject matter as well as ability level to achieve.

The average of the senior classes was 1.2 grade levels below their expected achievement.

In 1967 (October 5) the same test battery was given to the senior class of River View (227 students) and the results indicated an average or median grade level of .3 below expected achievement.

This represents a gain of almost 1 grade level which to say the least is promising.

Donald Rushing

As of 1964 only 17 percent of the high school graduates went on to college. The follow up studies of River View indicate that presently about 26 percent of the graduates are going on to college. Also an encouraging sign.

To digress to another consolidation experience in which I served, after two years in a new consolidated high school this same pattern emerged. Unquestioned improvement in achievement was continuous.

To cite another example relative to this same school district, prior to consolidation there had never been a National Merit Scholar representing any of the individual high schools. Since 1963 there has been three such scholars.

Results in State-wide scholarship tests have been equally on the upgrade. The last year that I was connected with the school system, we sent 37 pupils from the high school to take various State scholarship tests. 29 of these students placed in the top 10 of the district, 9 county area, and 7 placed in the top 5 in State-wide classification.

Seven years ago the 4 small high schools collectively placed 2 students in district competition and no one on the State level.

To be sure, these implications are perhaps not statistically significant enough to prove anything, but we have a strong hunch that in time it will be proof enough.

Finally, let us look at some of the so-called intangible values of a consolidated high school.

Again, statistical proof is not present, but nevertheless I can at least speak from my own experiences.

Above and beyond the comparative discussions which have preceeded there are some other plus factors in my opinion.

One plus factor I would choose to call atmosphere. The small schools in which I have had experience had developed into a very informal atmosphere in which very little striving for excellence was evident. That rare individual who did strive for academic achievement was so much in the minority that in most instances he quit striving so that he could be one of the gang again.

It seems to me that there has to be what I would call an academic atmosphere present before much effective education is possible.

Competition, while a naughty word to many, is still a strong motivating force for better performance, whether it be in football or in the classroom.

This pushing and stretching for excellence just did not exist in the small rural schools of my experience, and I might add that I graduated from a 115 pupil high school.

Donald Rushing

A sizeable consolidated high school today better provides the type of experiences which is more of the real world.

As time goes along, it becomes more evident that rural youngsters cannot successfully compete without an even break in an effective educational program.

We are no longer staying in the rural areas after graduation where we compete with other youngsters for jobs and college who had similar training as we did.

Industry, business, colleges, or technical schools do not give handicap scores like the duffer golfer gets to compete with a better prepared player.

Whether you are from the poorest school in the country or the best, the proof of the pudding is how well you meet the competition of the world. Without effective educational background, the result is likely to be like that of the Green Bay Packers playing our local high school team.

In summary let me say that in my experience there is no doubt that consolidating small rural schools is a painful and emotional process. I have survived three so far with basically the same problems and conflicts.

It has been the same type of emotional wrench from the one room school, to the township school, on to the many township schools.

I would agree that there is a loss of community spirit and to a certain extent, community pride when a small high school leaves a community. Especially this is true when an outstanding basketball team is also involved, of which I have also some knowledge.

However, speaking of my own experience, as time passes and conditions and demands for life change, the educational advantages which can be provided by the consolidated school far out weigh the nostalgia and emotional ties which adults attach to the small community school.

If I had any advice in striving toward better educational opportunities for youngsters relative to consolidation, it would simply be to staff your consolidation with the best people possible, preferrably with people who are not closely tied with present schools, provide the financial support for a 1st class program for youngsters; and have patience.

In three or four years you will wonder why it wasn't done ten years ago.

There are a number of residents who will always condemn a consolidation; but the weight of a better educational program will soon blunt their screams.

Donald Rushing

In closing let me add that the effort and incentive which has carried many rural youth to success over perhaps better prepared city youth is not now enough.

Exposure to good educational programs is no longer a questionable factor in adult success, it's vital. Thank you.